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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7852nd meeting

Friday, 23 December 2016, 11.25 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi	(Spain)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Martins
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Coleman
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/1057)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.25 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015) (S/2016/1057)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Responsive Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council Members to document S/2016/1057, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2258 (2015).

I now give the floor to Mr. Ging.

Mr. Ging: I am providing this update to the Security Council today on behalf of Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

As we meet today, the evacuation of the eastern districts of Aleppo may have concluded, but the situation in Syria remains catastrophic. Some 13.5 million people within Syria are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, including nearly 9 million who are food insecure.

This year has been marked by horrific suffering and the loss of so many lives in a conflict characterized by ever increasing inhumanity against the civilian population. Attacks on civilian infrastructure — including schools, medical facilities, settlements for the internally displaced and public markets — have destroyed institutions otherwise relied upon by Syrians for food, shelter, education and medical care. At least 126 attacks have been recorded against medical facilities this year, more than 770 medical personnel have been killed during the conflict and one in four schools has ceased to function, with some 2 million children out of school. Despite calls for an end to besiegement as a tactic of war, we end 2016 with hundreds of thousands of Syrian civilians — 700,000 to be precise — still trapped in besieged locations, while humanitarians continue to struggle to gain access for aid delivery.

The conflict in Syria has recently been most devastating in Aleppo, where the near-complete destruction of large parts of the city has subjected its civilian population to unspeakable horror. The United Nations welcomed the adoption of resolution 2328 (2016) earlier this week, in the hope that it would finally ensure that civilians in Aleppo were afforded all necessary protection and assistance. The United Nations role in Aleppo and in supporting the evacuation of the city has four main elements: to observe the evacuation itself, support the evacuees once they have left, seek access to the retaken areas of eastern Aleppo in order to provide assistance in those remaining in those areas, and continue with the ongoing humanitarian operations to support those across the remainder of the city.

The operation to evacuate people from the eastern districts of Aleppo drew to a close late last night. Overall, more than 35,000 people were evacuated, including some 20,000 people since the adoption of resolution 2328 (2016). Those evacuated included civilians and fighters and their families. Some 734 people were medically evacuated by ambulances, according to the World Health Organization.

To achieve this, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) were in the lead, working to ensure people wanting to leave could do so. Overall, 308 buses, 61 ambulances and 1,231 private vehicles were used in the evacuation, crossing numerous checkpoints from besieged eastern Aleppo through the western part of the city and into western rural Aleppo and onwards to Idlib. In parallel, an estimated 1,300 people were evacuated from the besieged villages of Fo'ah and Kafraya, in Idlib.

Due to lack of approval by the Government of Syria, the United Nations team did not have access to eastern Aleppo in recent months, but since 15 December undertook a monitoring and observation function there. It was stationed around the clock close to the Ramouseh checkpoint in the Government-controlled part of Aleppo. Additional United Nations staff were sent from Damascus in support. In accordance with resolution 2328 (2016), the United Nations team observed the evacuation of buses and ambulances and, to the extent

possible, monitored whether anyone was forcibly disembarked, detained or otherwise mistreated as they crossed through the checkpoint area.

The ICRC and SARC teams were present directly at the evacuation point and accompanied the convoys as they crossed each of the checkpoints. Further, humanitarian organizations were present on the non-State armed group side to receive those evacuated to ensure they received essential assistance. The evacuation operation was an extremely complex undertaking and was punctuated by frustrating stops and starts due to negotiations between the relevant parties, which were setting the terms and conditions for the evacuations, including insisting on synchronizing evacuations from eastern Aleppo and from besieged Fo'ah and Kafraya.

Once evacuated from the besieged area, civilians had the option to go where they wished. The overwhelming majority went to non-State armed-group areas. Two reception centres, in Al-Atarib, in Aleppo, and Sarmada, in Idlib, were set up to receive those evacuated, and information centres in Orem Al-Kubra and Kafr Naha continue to provide basic services and details about additional humanitarian support. While the majority opted initially to go to reception sites, many have subsequently moved on to be hosted by family and friends.

Humanitarian organizations have recorded the arrival of 23,615 people to the reception centres and to more than 60 villages. Approximately a thousand people were reported to have arrived in the camps along the Turkish border. Meanwhile a small number of those evacuated also chose to go to Government areas in western Aleppo city. Those evacuated from Fo'ah and Kefraya were initially moved to internally-displaced-person reception centres in Aleppo city; while some have stayed in Aleppo, others have moved on to sites prepared by the Government in Tartous, Homs and Latakia. The United Nations teams in Homs and Tartous have been providing humanitarian support.

Humanitarian needs among the evacuees arriving in reception centres have been acute. The evacuees are a displaced population that has endured months with little access to food, medical care or other essential items. Many of them have been physically and psychologically traumatized by the deprivation and bombardment that they have endured. Children are particularly badly affected. Families have been separated throughout the evacuation movement, and there have been reports of at least 75 children being separated from their families or otherwise unaccompanied upon their departure from eastern Aleppo. Multiple cases of moderate and severe malnutrition have also been reported.

The evacuation process itself was difficult and many times dangerous. A number of security incidents were reported during the evacuations. The United Nations received credible reports of non-Syrian allied forces in western Aleppo stopping a bus of 800 people on 16 December, detaining and beating 10 people and reportedly killing one person. Further, 20 buses were reportedly attacked and burned on 18 December by a non-State armed group while en route to the evacuation site. Other protection issues were reported, including people stranded in buses in harsh security and weather conditions, prevention of evacuations of some civilians by non-State armed groups, sporadic cases of detention of people at checkpoints, and ill-treatment and harassment of some people as they were being evacuated.

The United Nations and its partners mobilized a comprehensive response to make sure that evacuees have basic essentials. Over 30 partner non-governmental organizations are on the ground in Idlib. Evacuees at the reception areas are provided basic services to meet immediate needs, including food, winterized shelter and non-food items, and hygiene and sanitation products. Medical and psychosocial services are also available. Health partners are serving the reception centres and neighbouring villages through 22 mobile clinics. Specialized services are also available for individuals with specific needs, including women and girls, and children separated from their families or otherwise unaccompanied. Some 95 serious medical cases have been transferred to Turkey. The humanitarian teams on the ground will continue to scale up the response, as necessary, to ensure urgent and life-saving needs are met.

I would like to update and notify the Council of the arrangements undertaken pursuant to paragraph 7 of resolution 2328 (2016). While supporting the evacuation process was our immediate priority, the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria has also submitted a formal written request to the Government of Syria seeking a blanket travel authorization to Aleppo for all United Nations senior staff in country and humanitarian access to parts of Aleppo retaken by the Government yesterday.

There are currently 105 United Nations staff members in Aleppo. Of these, 34 have been fully dedicated to monitoring evacuations from eastern Aleppo within the framework of resolution 2328 (2016), while the remaining staff have been carrying out their humanitarian response duties throughout the rest of the city. As part of the ongoing surge support to Aleppo, the United Nations is also requesting agreement from the Government of Syria to surge up to a hundred additional staff, including 30 international staff, to strengthen monitoring and response in eastern Aleppo.

Under the auspices of resolution 2328 (2016), we are ready to implement a plan for all districts of eastern Aleppo in the coming days, as soon as we receive agreement from the Syrian Government to deploy. To date, the United Nations and its partners have been able to access nearly all formerly besieged neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo except those retaken by the Government of Syria as of yesterday. A team of 16 United Nations staff, along with four armoured vehicles, are on standby to deploy to these last inaccessible areas, as soon as Government permission is granted.

For all areas formerly besieged, in the first phase, assessments will be conducted of the number of civilians in these areas, their needs and the status of civilian infrastructure, including housing, food, medical care and other essential services. Medical teams are on standby to evacuate all remaining critical medical cases, and life-saving items are available for those in urgent need.

In the second phase, the United Nations and partners will launch a comprehensive multisectoral response, in conjunction with partners and other relevant institutions, as well as the deployment of additional surge staff as needed. This comprehensive response will include emergency assistance to residents, including shelter rehabilitation, solid waste and debris removal, livelihood support and, as soon as possible, rehabilitation of basic services. Throughout, United Nations teams would be on the ground in the neighbourhoods as much as possible to monitor and observe the situation and ensure the well-being of civilians, but all of this is subject to the consent of and coordination with the Syrian Government, which is pending.

I take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to the heroic staff of the ICRC and the SARC, and the non-governmental organizations and United Nations colleagues working diligently on providing a life-saving response. To all who have been on the frontline of this evacuation operation, we salute their courage, persistence and sacrifice. They inspire us with their basic humanity, which we should all share.

I turn now to areas outside of Aleppo, where the humanitarian situation is dreadful. In neighbouring Idlib governorate, the towns of Fo'ah and Kafraya remain besieged by non-State armed opposition groups that otherwise control the vast majority of the territory. As part of the agreement reached about the evacuation of Aleppo, evacuations in those towns are scheduled to resume on a tit-for-tat basis with Madaya and Zabadani in the coming days. As we have seen with the attack on the buses going to Fo'ah earlier last week, protection concerns are very high for the residents of the enclave.

There are also broader concerns that the civilian population in Idlib is at risk of suffering the same fate as those in Aleppo if it becomes the focus of a new and more intense offensive. Of the currently estimated population of approximately 2 million people, 700,000 of whom are internally displaced persons, including 35,000 from eastern Aleppo this month, the United Nations and it partners currently access vulnerable communities through its cross-border work out of Gaziantep and support approximately 700,000 people each month with food, and some 340,000 with medical treatments. Some 230,000 are provided with water and sanitation assistance each month.

In Al-Wa'er, a besieged neighbourhood on the outskirts of Homs city, the situation also remains of critical concern. Immediate humanitarian intervention is required to prevent the besieged neighbourhood, which hosts an estimated 50,000 civilians, from facing acute shortages of basic and lifesaving items. There is a collapse already of the limited medical services. Food stocks are running out as we speak and, since 26 November, medical evacuations have reportedly not been permitted. Two critical cases identified by the United Nations, one involving a pregnant woman, are in need of urgent evacuation.

We also continue to follow with concern the anti-Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) operations occurring around Al-Bab and Raqqa. The reported intensification of fighting from 8 December around ISIL-controlled Al-Bab town, including through airstrikes, is expected to result in further displacement. Preparations are ongoing in the surrounding areas to

receive potential internally displaced persons from the town, while United Nations partners continue to support the 10,000 internally displaced persons displaced by earlier fighting. In Raqqa the primary concern is the lack of humanitarian access and protection services. Reports indicate that people are in need of health services and food. In that regard, United Nations access to Hasakeh is a major concern, depending on a costly air bridge from Damascus.

ISIL advances in Palmyra and nearby areas in eastern Homs are also of major concern, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people to Homs city and surrounding areas. We again commend SARC and other partners for providing assistance to those displaced in such difficult circumstances.

I am pleased to report that there has been some improvement of the situation at the berm along the Syrian-Jordanian border. On 22 November, the United Nations and its partners resumed lifesaving humanitarian assistance at the berm through a newly constructed distribution point negotiated in September. The latest figures for the distribution of food and non-food items are 8,404 households compromising 31,094 individuals in Rukban. In addition, distributions started in Hadalat, and a new service facility, including a health clinic has been completed, enabling the delivery of health assistance. The water infrastructure is projected to be completed by January 2017.

As has been noted in the Council in the past, the United Nations and its partners reach some 6 million people in need every month through all modalities available. Cross-line inter-agency operations to besieged, hard-to-reach and other priority locations are a particularly vital lifeline for civilians in those vulnerable communities. Nearly 1.3 million people have been reached this year in those locations multiple times.

Although we continue to operate in an environment of acute humanitarian need, we are hindered by persistent obstacles in delivering much-needed assistance. For cross-line inter-agency convoys, ongoing insecurity in many areas and administrative delays on the part of Syrian Government in the approval of facilitation letters and convoy plans continue to hamper our efforts. What was reduced to a two-step approval process earlier this year has gone back again to being a 10-step process. We have secured agreement from the Syrian Government for only one cross-line convoy so far this month, reaching 6,000 people. That is despite receiving initial approvals to reach almost 800,000 people in December. We need timely approvals and simplified approval procedures. We have immediate capacity to deliver to 300,000 people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas per week, should we be given the access by the parties to the conflict.

We end 2016 at a place where humanitarian and protection needs are as acute and severe as they have ever been amid continued fighting across the country. Despite all the challenges, the United Nations, the ICRC, SARC and our other key humanitarian partners, though their heroic staff on the ground, continue to try to reach every Syrian in need. However, collectively we are falling unforgivably short in our responsibility at the global level to support them. I therefore call upon all Members of the Council and all parties to the conflict and their allies to redouble their efforts to end this conflict and in the meantime provide more effective support to humanitarian action for the innocent victims of this conflict.

As has been stated so many times, there is no humanitarian solution to this crisis. We welcome the announcement by United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura on the resumption of political talks in February. As the number of those dying, becoming displaced and suffering continues to rise, as we end 2016 a new political commitment to peace will be needed if 2017 is to offer any different prospect than the death and destruction of the past five years.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of all the members of the Security Council, I should like to thank Mr. Ging for his comprehensive briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make a statements.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): I thank Mr. Ging and his team for his briefing.

As this is New Zealand's last opportunity to address the humanitarian situation in Syria, we wanted to make a few remarks in the open Chamber.

Over the past two years, New Zealand has worked with the Security Council to try to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria. We were honoured to work with our co-leads Jordan and Spain last year, and with Egypt and Spain this year. We secured some modest achievements, most notably the two annual renewals of the humanitarian access resolutions first pioneered by Australia, Jordan and Luxembourg.

In Council terms, those resolutions and resolution 2286 (2016), on attacks on healthcare facilities and workers, were important achievements, especially when viewed against a background of near paralysis in the Council on the political track on Syria. However, in terms of real-world impacts, what has been achieved under those resolutions is a tiny fraction of what has been needed to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people.

During our term we witnessed some deeply disturbing trends: systematic attacks on hospitals and on medical and humanitarian workers; obstruction of food and essential supplies to civilian populations as a tactic of war; use of indiscriminate weapons with zero regard for civilians; and use of chemicals as weapons. These tactics of war undermine the basic tenets of international humanitarian law and should concern us all.

The need to address Syria's humanitarian crisis should be something on which all Council members can agree; and for, the most part, that has been the case. However, as we saw graphically last month, when humanitarian objectives do not square with the war-fighting aims of those with decision-making powers on the Council, the humanitarian objectives are the ones that are pushed aside, which is not how international humanitarian law is supposed to work.

Last month's vetoes of the simple draft resolution that New Zealand put forward with Egypt and Spain was but the latest example of an attitude that has troubled New Zealand deeply during our time on the Council: that is, the apparent indifference of a number of Council members to human suffering, even on a large scale. While that has been most apparent in the case of Syria, in connection with which a series of vetoes has been cast over the past five years, it is equally apparent in the Council's actions and its inability to take effective action with respect to the crises in Yemen, South Sudan and the Sudan.

We welcome the recent adoption of the resolutions allowing the United Nations to observe evacuations in Aleppo and the renewal of cross-border and cross-line humanitarian access. The Council's priority must be to address persistent efforts by the Syrian Government to prevent the full and effective implementation of those resolutions, which we have witnessed with depressing regularity over the past two years. As Mr. Ging has reminded us, we must now ensure the protection of the civilians fleeing eastern Aleppo, Fo'ah and Kefraya. In the longer term, we must ensure that the protection of civilians is prioritized throughout Syria and in the many other towns and communities that remain besieged or undergoing bombardment.

We welcome the determination others have shown in recent weeks to act when the Council will not. We hope that the resolution adopted in the General Assembly this week can lay the ground work for action to bring justice for the victims of this conflict. We also welcome the board of inquiry findings on the attack on the United Nations and Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy in Orem Al-Kubra. The information that the attack was highly likely perpetrated by the Syrian air force is deeply disturbing, as was the obstruction and delay by the Syrian Government in issuing visas to the investigators. We hope that the Council will be able to unite in welcoming that report and in condemning all attacks on humanitarian workers.

We pay tribute to the dedication and commitment of many, including United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, to achieve peace in Syria, to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and to Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien and Mr. Ging and their teams for their unwavering dedication and efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need and to the courage and sacrifice of humanitarian agencies and workers in Syria and to the generosity of neighbouring countries in sheltering the millions of Syrian refugees. We also thank our fellow humanitarian co-leads over the past two years — Spain, Egypt and Jordan — for their generous collaboration and their determination to help improve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

While the provision of humanitarian assistance is vital, it is only treating the symptoms of the conflict. External actors must set aside vested interests and narrow allegiances and prioritize action to end the conflict and promote genuine reconciliation. As we all know, only a political resolution with meaningful reconciliation and genuine political and security sector reform can provide a lasting peace to the civilians of Syria.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I understand that this is the final statement of my colleague from New Zealand in the Security Council, and I do not want to spoil his swan song. However just for protocol, just for the record, we do not agree with a number of the arguments he put forth. What is particularly unacceptable is the conflation he

made between the veto and his comment that someone is pursuing military goals without thinking about humanitarian consequences. If he is hinting at Russia, that is not the case.

We have just heard about a very complex operation in Aleppo to evacuate civilians, so I want to assure the representative of New Zealand that humanitarian consequences are of extreme concern to us when it comes to any planning in Syria.

Another even more important problem that the representative of New Zealand did not mention is the fact that terror organizations are used to achieve foreign policy objectives. That is the real problem that, again and again, the Security Council needs to be address.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.